swing states, while the historic and current sources of support for right-wing agendas is passed over in silence. Much also has been made of the link between educational differences and voting patterns and this is then elided with class differences in political orientations. Those without post-secondary credentials are lumped into the ‘working class’ and those with credentials become part of an educated elite. There is no question that educational credentials matter, but it is very problematic to define everyone with any kind of college or university credential as part of an educated elite. In an age of educational inflation, there are many well-educated individuals whose paid employment is in a ‘working-class job’. The days when the working class could be conflated with the stereotypical blue-collar industrial worker are long gone, although even in the 1950s and 1960s this was only the reality in some industrial centres. This is not to suggest that there is no working-class support for authoritarian populism; however, before we can really understand its extent and rationale, we need to be clear about what that term means. It is also worth reflecting on the fact that the petty bourgeoisie is the suspect class in much of the literature on the authoritarian movements of the interwar years. What is known about those charged by the authorities for the attack on the US Capitol suggests there is something to this in the current populist surge. Anthropologists’ attention to idiographic description can contribute to displacing overly generalised and simplistic explanations but clear analytical conceptualisations are also required.

Thomas Dunk
Department of Sociology
Brock University
St Catharines, ON L2S 3A1
Canada
tdunk@brocku.ca

ASHER GOLDSTEIN

Developing statizens: biometric technologies and digital identification

In what follows, I elaborate on one of Appadurai’s key points (2021): that the concept of ‘statizen’ highlights global right-wing state re-articulation through digital identification. In order to do so, I instrumentalise Appadurai’s argument that the ‘statizen’ is characterised by the ‘centrality of bureaucratic documentation as the sole and over-riding criterion of citizenship’ and the ‘success in defining a state-issued document as the basis of all
of life’ (Appadurai, 2021). Taking this discussion on the making of ‘statizens’ forward, I consider two contemporary cases of digital identification rollouts by the right-wing governments in power in Jamaica and Kenya as instances of the deployment of ‘biometric imaginaries’ of state belonging (Donovan 2015). Together, these cases illuminate the salience of the bureaucratic focus of ‘statizens’ in anthropologies of the right-wing transformation, resistant practices to the imposition of digital identification initiatives and how postcolonial nationalism informs a global perspective on statizen-making to these forms of surveillance, technosolutionism and lean governance.

**Jamaica and NIDS**

McKinson’s (2019) article takes as its focus the controversy surrounding, and resistance to, the Jamaican government’s 2017 announcement and attempted rollout of a National Identification System (NIDS). Situated in surveillance studies, McKinson’s critique of NIDS is grounded in a decolonial shift that challenges NIDS as the ‘merging of the body and technology predicated on state- legitimated techniques of branding, surveillance, and control’ (2019: 734) as an example of what Arora (2016) has called postcolonial datafication governance. This approach to studying digital identification is illuminating for its emphasis on surveillance as a performed, spatio-temporal archive with special attention to the resistance of societies of the Global South (McKinson 2019: 735). The popular resistance to NIDS is understood by McKinson to be ‘a collective psychic reaction to black carcerality in a postcolonial society’, drawing on national imaginaries of entangled religious, musical, liberatory discourses to connect the planned identification and statizen-making of NIDS to earlier colonial practices of surveillance and control (2019: 736). Resistance articulated in these terms bridged domestic experiences to contemporary transnational right-wing assemblage that sourced funding for NIDS from the US-dominated Inter-American Development Bank (Dunn 2020: 333). In so doing, McKinson’s article presents a compelling case for the resistant belonging possible in postcolonial nationalism, offering a Caribbean counterpoint of nationalist democratic resistance to Appadurai’s contention that ‘Nationalism – white, brown or yellow – is no longer an end but a means, a means to the democratic installation of anti-democratic regimes’ (2021).

**Kenya and Huduma Namba**

Jacobsen’s (2020) article explores the turn towards biometric voter registration (BVR) in Kenya, as an example of a new liberal technique of interventionism, noting that the use of BVR is increasingly widespread, except in the countries actively promoting it. By making this connection, Jacobsen overlays Appadurai’s ‘statizen’ critique further with global coloniality in that the practices and techniques of bureaucratic identification are shown to be new technocratic forms of intervention and technical experimentation, rather than serving their stated objectives of democracy promotion. Weitzberg’s (2020) article on the colonial origins of identification regimes in Kenya, and the imperial circulations of these technologies reinforces this point, and further stresses the making of racialised subjectivities in the process of identification as ‘a chain of embodied practices, … [or] biometric rituals’ (2020: 32). Addressing the
technosolutionism1 of BVR, Jacobsen is attentive as much to what is included within the technocratic problem-frame as what challenges are obscured, arguing that with the widespread ‘roll-out of BVR we are seeing the contours of a modality, which places greater emphasis on the use of technocratic strategies to resolve complex political challenges’ (Jacobsen 2020: 128). To illustrate, Jacobsen notes that the significant politics of identification technologies are excluded from the apolitical technocratic problem-frame, pointing to instances of voter purges, displacement of fraud onto other aspects of the voting process and the creation through digital gatekeeping of new opportunities for electoral corruption (2020: 129). Moreover, Jacobsen notes how the Kenyan domestic issue of illicit financing of elections is completely obscured by a BVR-problem frame, where instead in adopting a technocratic solution with BVR, Kenyan confidence and contestation was displaced from the trustworthiness of political actors to technical systems, potential outside interference and the trustworthiness of voters. Such displacement of the objects of contestation and statizen-making through discourses of suspect voters resonates with Weitzberg’s contention that identification practices constitute social and political relations as much as they reflect them (2020: 34). This insight is important in that it challenges the central claims of reliability, transparency and accountability in statizen-making projects like BVR by politicising ‘provision of “neutral”, technical and procedural assistance’ (Jacobsen 2020: 138).

**Lean governance and the rise of statizens**

The above cases have illustrated resistance to these systems of surveillance, their shortfalls in practice and their entanglement within postcolonial politics. While recent judicial review of the legislation permitting the Indian Aadhaar, Jamaican NIDS and Kenyan Huduma Namba digital identification programmes promises some oversight (Dunn 2020), the same parties remain in power in each state and committed to implementing transformational digital identification initiatives, invested in technosolutionist modernisation theories. Through these cases, I both draw on and advance Appadurai’s argument for the centrality of state-issued bureaucratic documentation in right-wing agendas to secure the state. I do so by focusing on instances of resistance and politicisation in Jamaica and Kenya. The cases considered highlight how politically polarised statizen-making projects are erased by their bureaucratic rationalities, which obscure that ‘technocracy itself is an ideology’ (Morozov 2013: 138). However, the politicisation of these statizen-making projects within postcolonial identity frames is profoundly ambivalent, in that they both challenge the colonial heritages of identification and technosolutionism while deepening polarisation and obscuring transparency on allegedly neutral, modernising technocratic bases.

Asher Goldstein
REMESO
Linköping University
Norrköping 60174
Sweden
asher.goldstein@liu.se

1 Recalling Morozov’s definition of ‘technosolutionism’ as ‘Recasting all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized’ (2013: 5).
References


RAE JEREZA

Revisiting social media as far-right modality

Since Trump’s election in 2016, scholars from various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have interrogated the role of social media in far-right recruitment and the proliferation of racist and misogynistic ideologies. Yet, existing studies generally tend to take for granted the separation between ‘mainstream’ and ‘extreme’ politics in their analyses of digital affordances, framing right-wing activities as illiberal and antithetical to democracy. I suggest that an anthropological examination of online sociality might lead us to trouble such neat distinctions and prompt us to attend to the unexpected complications of the unmarked political centre – the liberal democratic tradition – in the spread of white supremacist ideas. To understand the new right, anthropologists must interrogate the assumptions and practices of those who ostensibly seek to counter far-right activities.

As an anthropologist who studies digital labour and the far right, I see these complications most clearly in my work on commercial content moderation based in the USA: the task of reviewing user-generated content for commercial platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Roberts 2019). My correspondences with Facebook content moderators, tech journalists, content policy workers and NGOs in the past year, however, have taught me that commercial content moderation is perhaps better conceptualised as an ecology, involving practices, relations and discourses aimed at solving the ‘problem’ of objectionable content.